

Statement for the Special Legislative Task Force for UW Restructuring

May 9, 2012

Paulette Feld

IS Network Support Technician-UW Oshkosh Polk Library

In Fall of 2011, Human Resources personnel on the Comprehensive campuses and Extension participated in a variety of exercises with all employee groups to develop an assessment of the current University Personnel System. On most campuses employees were given the opportunity to share issues that they believed would be important for a new Personnel System to address in group and one on one discussions. Based on the findings of those conversations. Workgroups were developed to address the issues.

The Classified Staff on the campuses have had concerns about how Human Resources and our positions will be impacted as a result of the changes in our state over the past 15 months. I can't emphasize enough the feeling of uncertainty and discomfort present among the employees on the UW campuses. It is especially important for all of the Classified Staff at the Universities to have input into the content of the Personnel System. This is in stark contrast to employees in other state agencies who are struggling with guidelines and work rules mandated with no voice.

Earlier this year, I served on the Employment Category Workgroup. Our Workgroup consisted of representatives from 9 of the Comprehensive campuses and Extension and included 3 Academic Staff members, 4 Classified Staff members, 2 faculty members and 1 Limited Appointee. In my comments to the Board of Regents on March 8, I outlined the objectives and spoke about the work that our group had accomplished at the time:

- Review current employee category structure-does the structure as it is now (Academic Staff, Classified, Limited, and Faculty) fit the needs of a new University Personnel system, or is there something better for all types of employees? Create a titling structure-the group has taken titles in all current employee categories and placed them in Job Families-relating positions that require similar knowledge, skills and abilities; represent a career path from lowest

to highest job level; possess related key behaviors; have similar marker competitive pay characteristics and conditions.

Seeing all the titles arranged by job families puts the structure of the various functions important to the University was a valuable exercise for our group.

Unlike other State Agencies, the UW, by its nature as an educational institution, has different categories of employees. As a result of history and governance, the University has different benefits, rules and other items that vary based on employee category. These differences in the University have created what has been perceived over the years and described as a "caste system" For UW system Classified Staff, having a voice on these workgroups at this time has been extremely valuable in reducing the anxiety felt by many of us. It is extremely important that as we move ahead, that the structure put in place continues to work toward the elimination of any perception of classism amongst employee groups.

Classification and titling have been a perennial issue among the Classified Staff. I've talked to many colleagues over the years who became frustrated and confused with the process for evaluating their classifications. Often, many feel that the titles available through the current system do not fully address the work that is done on a University campus. One of the issues the Employee Categories workgroup discussed is overlap between Academic Staff positions and Classified positions. There is hope that the work we have done in the Employee Category group will lead to addressing some of these issues. The UPS should be able to put in place where University employee titles are evaluated based on the work on campuses, not comparing to other statewide classifications. This will hopefully lead to a system where employees are compensated for their skills and expertise.

Employee categories was a topic that invoked spirited discussion in our workgroup and was the one issue that a vote was conducted. The issue of whether to combine Academic Staff with Classified Staff or to create two other groups consisting of Instructors (Faculty, Instructional Academic Staff and Researchers) and another of a combination of Non-Instructional Academic Staff and Classified Staff was discussed. We discussed the issue of making such a change and the impact it would have on State Statute as written. There was also concern in our group that rearranging and combining existing groups would be problematic for those union members who have or might recertify in the future.

Since March 8, all of the Workgroups among the comprehensive campuses have submitted draft reports which are currently under consideration and comment by employees across the system. The workgroups looked at Benefits, Compensation, Employee Environment, Employee Movement and Recruitment and Assessment. Since all of the workgroup meetings were done via conference call, the meeting in Stevens Point on March 29 to present and discuss the drafts from each group was valuable in understanding where the Personnel System is headed.

In my review of the drafts, there are several overarching themes that are visible. Knowing these groups worked independently with minimal collaboration between groups, it is amazing how often similar conclusions were reached. The themes I observed that the UPS is attempting to address include:

- Governance--allowing for a governance group for Classified Staff similar to the Governance structure in place by statute for Faculty and Academic Staff. This is important in eliminating the issue of the chaste system. It will allow all employees of the University to have the opportunity to have a voice and participate as a vital part of the campus community. Keeping the existing Governance groups in place (Faculty and Academic Staff as well as students) and adding Classified/Operational staff as an additional group is important in promoting the flexibility of the University. Many campuses, have had Advisory Councils in place. UW Oshkosh has had a very productive council in place for over 10 years. These groups have allowed the Classified Staff the opportunity to participate in campus discussions on a level that was not the norm 20 years ago. Over the past year I have heard of these groups being expanded to the other campuses. With minimal work and legislation, the Advisory Groups can be expanded to discuss issues, policy and advise the administration on the same level as the Faculty and Academic Staff groups.
- Consistency—extremely apparent in the discussions of benefits, work rules and compensation decisions that all employee groups work within the same policies and guidelines.
- Recruitment and Retention of the best—ways to allow mobility among all staff at all levels of the University on Campuses and between campuses, the ability to move from one employee category to another in your professional field on campus.

Despite the overall positive tone of the draft reports, there are several areas of concern for classified employees at the University:

Transfers-because of the elimination of Mandatory Transfer by seniority, Classified Staff believe that the University has actually lost one method of retaining the best employees and one of the opportunities employees have to move to positions with greater responsibility or new roles. We've heard from various groups how Mandatory Transfer and Seniority do not always allow the best candidate to move into a positions. Conversely, many of us who are familiar with this can share instances where an employee moves from a less than perfect placement to one where they succeed and grow to be a valuable part of the staff. Proof that the workgroup process was sensitive to these concerns is in the consideration that will be given to internal applicants. Further discussion on a broader scale is needed that will hopefully develop an end result that will not make employees believe they have lost an important benefit.

Many classified staff are uncomfortable with the merit/pay for performance route that is being recommended. Applying for raises and the fact that employees doing the same work will be paid at difference rates is foreign to most of us, including someone like me who has spent their entire career working at the University for one department. Emphasis on merit and performance pay will also promote the attitude that certain campuses pay better than others, have and have not if you will. In implementing this system, it will be extremely important for the University to demonstrate true consistency across units and eliminate any perception of favoritism or elitism between campuses. Overall, no matter what the merit or pay for performance qualifications are, without funding, there will be continued concern. I quote one of the work group reports "This problem is further exacerbated when there is no pay plan for a period of time". The up side of compensation for all employees being administered through UW System is that we will no longer have the issue of the Board of Regents and Administration advocating for some employees but not all of them.

We are moving toward completion of Phase 3 of the project. In this phase, reports are currently available on line for comment from all University personnel. It is my understanding that most campuses are using various tools including surveys and group discussion to get feedback from employees on the drafts. Unfortunately, there are some campuses that are not extending these opportunities equally to all employee groups. These feedback opportunities are an important phase of our work. Once the employees comment on these draft reports, it is expected that the Workgroups will begin discussions to determine how the recommendations can be utilized and

worked into the design of the system. It is important to the workgroups to know that the final product will have buyin from all categories of University employees on all campuses. We want our work to show that all employees are being listened to equally. The revised drafts that come out of Phase 4 this summer will be ready to allow for another round of feedback opportunities in Fall of 2012. This will allow the final structure to be in place by March of 2013 and move toward implementation July of 2013.

Although I remain concerned for classified staff as a result of the changes we've seen in the past months, I believe that the intentions of the University are to involve all employees. It will take time, even after July 2013, to determine whether the work we have done has improved the University and given more flexibility as it relates to employees. The dialogues that have begun to develop the draft to date must continue into the future.